

GLIMPSES INTO OUR PAST by Michael Green

3. THE GRIFFYDAM LOVE FEAST



Fresco showing early Christian meal

The Love Feast had its origins in the common meals shared by the early Christians in fellowship and love and where the hungry were fed. Often the meal also contained sacramental elements. Gradually the two separated and became celebrated as the Love Feast and Holy Communion. The former slowly disappeared but was resurrected again in the early 18th century principally by the Moravians who still celebrate it today.

The Moravians had a strong influence on John Wesley and it was while attending a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate Street that he felt his heart “strangely warmed”. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Love Feast, which he saw as a means of deepening fellowship, encouraging testimony and allowing the Holy Spirit to be at work, became an established feature of Methodism almost from the very beginning.

It would, therefore, have been held at Griffydam from the forming of a society there around 1760 and, until the chapel opened in 1778, it would have been held in followers’ homes.

The meal was now symbolic. The key elements of the Love Feast were the singing of hymns, extemporary prayers, distribution of the bread or cake by stewards to the members of the congregation seated in their pews, a collection for the poor, passing round of water in the loving cup with its two handles and the giving of testimonies.

Opening the Love Feast for many years, would have been the singing of *Come and let us sweetly join Christ to praise in hymns divine* specially written by Charles Wesley for it. There was no set order for the service which was based on spontaneity. It was often highly charged and there would be conversions. Revivals would be started and continued at them. They were very popular and admission was on production of a current class ticket. This was strictly enforced and sometimes class tickets were borrowed so keen were people to attend!



Distributing bread during a Moravian Love Feast today

Towards the end of the 19th century the Love Feast began to go out of favour and by the beginning of the 20th it had all but disappeared from the Plan. Some have said that this coincided with the beginning of the decline of Methodism. One feature though was carried over to the Holy Communion service and this was the collection for the Poor (now Benevolence) Fund.

The Griffydam Love Feast was an annual event held on Easter Monday and the first written account of it is found in a letter of 25th April 1821 from William Kidger, a

Griffydam class leader, to his daughter and son in law, Mr and Mrs Tucker, which began *“I hereby give you an account of our memorable Love Feast. It commenced at two o’ clock and we left the chapel with some difficulty at half past five. Had there been time, I doubt not but that scores, if not hundreds more, would have declared what the Lord had done for them.*



Methodist loving cup c 1840

In 1856 it was felt that the time allotted for the Love Feast was too short and a proposal was made that it should start at 1.00 instead of 2.00 pm which prompted an amendment that it should start at 11.00 am!

An article appearing in the Methodist Recorder in 1898 stated that the service then started at 1.30 pm lasting the whole afternoon and concluding with a sermon in the evening. It went on to say that “from generation to generation” people had come from surrounding villages and as far afield as Birmingham.

Exceptionally, Griffydam’s Love Feast continued well into the 20th century. It is said that first on his feet would always be member and local preacher, John Johnson. The late Syd Hayward told how the whole village was involved in providing hospitality following the Love Feast in the form of food for those attending and how the length of the service had now become much shorter commencing at 2.30 pm and finishing around 4.00 pm. An evening service followed at 6.00 pm conducted by the minister.

Its Love feast was held continuously for almost 200 years until around the 1950s. This is surpassed, however, by the Methodist one held on the first Sunday in July in the barn at Alport in the Derbyshire Dales started in the 1760s and still held today.

In recent times, there have been efforts to revive the Love Feast and if any church feels it would like to hold one and would like material then this can be supplied by the writer on emailing him at michael@theoldbell.co.uk